



A Place To Live In

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The haphazard effort now being made to house the population of North America reeks with all the commercial rot that characterizes nearly everything we do under the Price System. In housing, as in other things, the game is to ream the consumer for all he has plus all he can borrow.

At present, the socio-business pressures are directed toward larger, more elegant, and more gadgeted houses, with more spacious lots, and situated at greater distances from town. Thus, the social trend in housing is toward Suburbia, except for one thing—the cost, both individual and social. To provide a high standard of housing for all North Americans requires a social strategy which is in an opposite direction from that being pushed by business promotion.

The business gangs of the Continent are all in favor of larger and more costly housing for the public. Business spokesmen keep harping on the principle that the consumer should spend at least 25 per cent of his gross income for housing; and they lament that many consumers are falling short of this 'goal.' But business goes even further than this in its recommendations. It points out that a 'well-built' modern house will last for fifty years or more and there is a danger that it will still be in service after the mortgage has been paid off, with the result that the dweller will not, then, be paying 25% of his income on the house. To correct this 'gruesome' possibility, it is suggested by some that house mortgages be extended for 50 or more years—that is, for the probable duration of the house. This will enable the present owner to 'afford' a still larger house; and his successors will have the responsibility of helping to pay for it. Incidentally, the bankers will collect more interest on choice mortgage debt. According to the business ballyhoo artists, a forty-thousand dollar home is not too much for a middle income family to enjoy (i.e., be burdened with). However, if the citizen has no substantial assets and no significant income, he can sleep under bridges for all that the business administration cares.

Not only are the real estate lobbies in favor of larger houses with longer mortgages but so are the gadget manufacturers, the house service enterprises, the labor unions, the automobile manufacturers, and the oil merchants. Since World War II, and particularly since the closing of the Korean War, suburban housing has done more than any other one thing (except possibly armaments) to keep the business boom from fading. Construction materials are high cost: contract profits are even higher; and labor costs are 'out of this world.' Then, the houses have to be equipped and decorated as no houses in history have ever been furnished. In order to have large lots, the housing must be scattered over expansive areas, sometimes wasting good agricultural land, and always cluttering up the sides of the roadways. It is estimated that a million acres of farmland in the United States is being lost to housing developments and other building construction each year.

As the suburbias expand into the countryside, they present many new problems, social and economic as well as political. The service lines—telephone, power, sewage, water, delivery—extend for many miles beyond the city centers; and the unit costs increase as the distances increase and chances for trouble in the lines accumulate. Then, of course, there is the problem of extended transportation to and from the place of employment, which usually begins with the family automobile and may involve three or more forms of transportation, each way, before the journey is finished, and which may consume as much as two hours of time (and sometimes more) each way.

Already, it is dawning on sociologists that the confinement, the uniformity, and the monotony, as well as the matriarchal dominance of Suburbia create a poor environment in which to raise the next generation of citizens. The children may learn something of the world in which they live from watching television; but, more often than not, they learn about 'worlds' that do not exist or, what is nearly as bad (if not worse), about 'worlds' that should not exist in this period of human history. Thus, in Suburbia, the children are forced into an artificial stultifying environment. The adult males struggle through the rush period of traffic congestion twice a day to get some place to work at jobs for other people—jobs that have little relationship to their own personal problems or aspirations. The mother must fuss around the house, trying to keep up with the Joneses and otherwise keeping her family in a conventional groove; and, possibly, from economic pressure, seek some form of local employment to supplement the family income.

The alternative to living in Suburbia for most families is crowding into an antiquated area of a city, tolerating the atmosphere of old housing, insecticides and exposing the children to the influence of juvenile gangs. If one can afford to lay out several hundred dollars a month for a penthouse apartment, life in the city might be tolerable; but, how many of our citizens can live in penthouse apartments?

EXODUS FROM THE FARM

There was a time when the great majority of the people lived on farms, close to the problems that would confront them all their lives, and in close contact with primitive nature. Of course, most of them succumbed to the factors of primitive nature prior to the advent of middle age, which is another story. Nevertheless, there was, then, a range and diversity of interests and activities to challenge the individual on grounds that were familiar to him.

Most townships and counties are unprepared to cope with the sudden, post-war development of Suburbia. Schools and recreation facilities are inadequate. Public transportation and other services have not been planned ahead and have to be improvised. The low-tax assessment of the areas (which was used as a lure in promoting the sale of new houses) has to be drastically altered upward, which pleases no one.

In their basic aspects, there is no question about the superiority of modern housing over that of a hundred years ago, or over most of that of 25 years ago. With electric lights, automatic heat, refrigerations, telephone, radio, automobile transportation, nearby shopping centers, and packaged foods, the way of life about the house is far more convenient and comfortable and less arduous than that of the past. But the present pattern has been promoted by business enterprise, not designed by social engineers, with the result that the pattern of living in America will soon defeat us; the cost is too high.

The housing of the population, under technological administration, could be made much more convenient and comfortable than it is today; the side effects would be far less severe; and, at the same time, the individual and social cost could be greatly reduced. Further, there would not be the distant and frantic commuting to and from the places of employment. But, business would not like it; the labor unions would not like it; and the service companies would complain. For, the cost of construction, maintenance, and service would be only a fraction of that in the modern suburban dwellings.

Horizontal expansion of cities and suburban residential areas creates social and individual problems of a rising magnitude. The transportation and supply lines become lengthened as the periphery grows outward from the social and economic center which supplies the area and provides employment for its breadwinners. To reduce costs, the lines of supply and communications must be shortened and made more durable. So, a new design of housing is becoming mandatory.

The simplest way to achieve the desired result is by means of vertical expansion.

Some compromise efforts are already being made to overcome the disadvantages of suburban housing through the construction of large, many-storied apartment houses, often many of them placed in proximity to each other. The large life insurance companies are taking an active part in such developments. The best of these apartment developments consist of 12 to 20 stories, reinforced concrete structures. They are appearing in or near many of our large cities. As contrasted with Suburbia, the chief advantages are:

Durability. The foundations, framework, and service lines are far more durable than those found in private suburban housing. They are fire-resistant, and they will withstand earth tremors and severe storms. The buildings can be maintained in efficient operating condition for several times the duration of those in the suburbs.

Economy of Space. Many more people can be housed per acre of ground, even after liberal allowances for open park and recreation areas are taken into consideration.

Convenience of Services. Many services can be provided within or near the apartment building. These include restaurants, laundry, room service, halls and facilities for holding meeting and parties; dispensaries of groceries, drugs, and household supplies; theaters and other means of recreation. In Suburbia, these same services might involve miles of travel, if available at all.

Concentration of Facilities. Instead of many small grocery, drug, and other shops—or a remote big shopping center—the facilities can be concentrated near at hand. And better facilities can be provided, because the cost of maintenance would be less per unit, due to the larger and more steady patronage. Another bad feature of the large shopping centers in Suburbia would be avoided—the long walk from where the car is parked to the shops. Parks, theaters, playgrounds, swimming pools, and other recreation facilities are located nearby and are readily accessible.

Continuous Service. Whereas the facilities of Suburbia close up at night, turning the whole area into a land of silence and apparent desertion, a concentrated population center can remain 'alive' and active throughout the twenty-four hours of the day and the seven days of the week. To one who has not yet been regimented to its pattern (and even to many of those who have), there is nothing more desolate than a residential area at night or a big city on Sunday (with the exception of a completely abandoned mining town or construction camp). Yet, with a properly constructed multi-storied building, it is possible for a resident to have darkness and quiet in his apartment at any time of the day or night that he may desire. Also, the temperature can be regulated to suit his immediate needs. He does not have to conform in his activities to a deadly routine by-the-clock pattern of conduct. One can eat, sleep, and be otherwise active at any time that fits his convenience and inclination. And, in one's apartment, he can be far more isolated (if that suits his purpose) than it is possible to be in a suburban home.

We do not mean to imply that these advantages have been achieved in full in all modern apartment house developments; but the trend is set in that direction and much progress has been made.

USE OF SPACE

With vertical expansion, say in a sixteen-story, reinforced concrete structure, the bottom one or two floors can be used to provide public facilities, such as dispensaries of supplies and personal services, lounging and recreation rooms, nurseries, offices, etc. The basement can be used for the building service equipment, laundries, workshops, storage, and car garages. The top floor can be used for restaurants, reading rooms, ballrooms, and other public facilities. The intermediate stories can be devoted to dwellings. Rapid, completely automatic elevator service provides easy and comfortable vertical transportation.

The type of apartment houses we refer to here has nothing in common with the congested, ill-smelling slum blocks of most large cities of today. They are not the type of city congestion that the families who move to the suburbs are trying to 'get away from' now.

Further, with the population all housed and serviced within a small space horizontally, parks and other open recreational areas can be situated close at hand and maintained for public use. In the modern Suburbia, with its miles of private yards, narrow roadways, and back alleys, there is often no open, public area anywhere around. In order to enjoy the 'wide open spaces' at all, the family must get in the car, travel long distances over crowded roads; then, if there is not a park in the vicinity, it must invade some farm or private woodland or merely park along some public road. It is obvious that much greater freedom of action and movement can be obtained from concentrated, vertically disposed population centers than from a widely spread smear of private houses and lots.

MULTI-STORY APARTMENT

In a multi-story apartment development, a large population can be housed in close proximity to the city center and industrial plants on which the people depend for employment and commerce. Under these conditions, adequate public transportation can readily be provided to handle the movement of people from their dwellings to the places of employment, shopping, and mass entertainment. Thus, there is less dependence on the private automobile, which, when everyone requires one in his daily routine, becomes a public nuisance.

Although the multi-story apartment houses we have been describing provide the lowest unit cost of operation for the services rendered, for both the individual and the society, they do not constitute Technocracy's final answer to the housing problem. As now constructed, they represent a compromise with the Price System. They are developed where large concentrations of people are demanded by the present system of operation; and their primary purpose is to make profits for their owners. They are not part of an over-all urban plan, only an adjunct to the existing hodgepodge of city expansion. At best, they are a remedial antidote for Suburbia.

Technocracy's design for an Urbanate block would provide residence for 16,000 to 20,000 people. A typical block would be rectangular in shape, about 400 meters wide and 1,000 meters long, with the building around the periphery and an open space in the interior. The outer wall would be continuous of some heavy form of construction; for example, meter-thick reinforced concrete. The inner part would be terraced, with open insets to provide adequate lighting. The central area would be park-like space, possibly with an open waterway going through, at least provided with warm swimming pools.

All transportation around and within the Urbanate block would be below ground level. Parking and delivery would be underneath the buildings, with entrance from sunken roadways around the outside of the wall. Between the sunken roadway and the outer wall of the block would be a wide sidewalk at ground level, with overpasses across the roadway. Beneath the sidewalk would be a service tunnel, through which the power lines, telephone lines, water pipes, sewage pipes, and other lines would pass, and where they would be easily and readily accessible for inspection and servicing. This tunnel would be large enough to drive a truck and other service equipment through.

Within the outer wall would be the risers, elevators, ventilating shafts, pipelines, etc. Thus, with (information missing; "1m"? -ed) thick wall plus a space between it and the dwellings, the residents in the block would be well protected from external hazards, such as concussions, missiles, and heavy winds. Such a block could withstand a nearby explosion of a lesser magnitude atomic bomb; and it would provide maximum shelter from the effects of nearby hydrogen bomb explosions.

Within the Urbanate block, there would be all the ordinary facilities for living—supplies of food and other essential materials, eating places, nurseries, schools, theaters, meeting places, distribution centers, personal services, recreational facilities, etc. Thus, there would be a wide range and variety of selective opportunities for living available at all times. Within such a block the maximum service can be provided the people at a minimum cost in terms of area, energy, human effort, and resources.

The Urbanate may consist of only one block or several, depending on the functional and personnel demands of the particular locality—depending on whether it is the center for an agricultural unit, an industrial sequence, a transportation network, or a recreational area. One block would ordinarily suffice for an agricultural unit. A large seaport city may contain a dozen or more blocks.

URBANATE RECREATION

Beyond the Urbanates would be large, open spaces, such as woodlands, mountains, lakes, and seashores. These would be free to public utilization without the interference of 'Private Property —No Trespassing' signs all over the place. Both public and private transportation would be available to all at all times. For those who have the time and inclination, long leisurely voyages on the waterways of the Continent, in comfortable accommodations atop water-trains, could be enjoyed. Such trips would be made by the school-age children as a regular part of their education.

With a large majority of the population of the North American Technate freed from functional employment at any one time, much attention will be devoted to providing places for living with emphasis on avocational and recreational features. Thus, many places on the Continent, which are suitable for pleasant living but not essential to the functional operations, will be developed into comfortable, convenient, and safe places for enjoyable living. Being free of the plunderers of organized politics, business, crime, and 'welfare,' the Urbanates of Technocracy will provide the basis for a culture that is dynamic, challenging, and interesting, as well as pleasing—a culture with intrinsic merits, as contrasted with the commercialized sham of the Price System.

When we view the slums and the palaces, as well as the residential blocks and the Suburbias of the Price System—with their tensions, hazards, discomforts, restrictions, strifes, and inconveniences we realize that there is a long way yet to go in order to achieve the goals of functional living specified by Technocracy. The incentive of money-making, which dominates the hoping, thinking, and striving of the typical North American family, will be displaced by challenges of other sorts. The interest-tendencies and initiative of the individual will serve to guide him into ways of living that impel him to give and take from life

that which suits him as an individual. The regimentations and inhibitions inherent in the Price System will cease to carry their compulsions over the life of the individual. He will, then, have the maximum opportunity to become and act as an individual.

We characterize this Way of Life in general terms; for, there are so many different ways of enjoying life, fitted to individual differences, environmental circumstances, and acquired interests, that it would be complicated, indeed, to describe all of the possibilities in specific terms.

During the past twenty years of this Continent, many mediocre people have risen to positions of economic elegance merely by being conservative and riding upward on the economic expansion plus going heavily into debt. This is a highly artificial and tenuous situation; and it could run into trouble almost over night if the expansion should slow down or run into an impasse.

In the Technate, everyone will be provided abundance, freedom from toil, and security for life as a consequence of his living in this age of highly developed technology and being located on the North American Continent. There will be no economic distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving'; and, thus, the greatest distinction between the two will be erased.

Basic to all the other pursuits of the individual must be a dwelling which he can call home. Some types of 'homes' can be so burdensome and inconvenient as to constitute a drag on the life of the people living in them—they demand too much and provide too little. At its best, the home should provide the most in the way of comfort, conveniences, and facilities and demand the least in care, cost and worry. In providing the best for all the people, Technocracy's design for housing far surpasses anything else that has ever been proposed. It is here, ready and waiting to be put into effect as soon as enough people on this Continent get tired and disgusted with their struggles under the Price System.

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